

*The Sound of Dreams*

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## **Introduction:**

In this paper, I will be exploring the phenomenon of dream listening by analyzing various texts related to the subject and an original soundscape composition whose content symbolically represents fragments of a selection of my dreams with a particular focus on conveying perceived auditory impressions while in the dream state.

## **Literature Review:**

My initial introduction to this topic came to me through the writings of the composer Pauline Oliveros. In her book *Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice*, Oliveros offers training techniques for deep listening, a meditative practice that attempts to expand the perception of sound and consciousness to include the entire space/time continuum. This includes not only actively focusing one's full attention on sounds in the immediate environment, but also expanding this awareness to include auditory impressions in memories, thoughts, and dreams (Deep Listening 1-4). In the paper, *Quantum Listening: From Practice to Theory (To Practice Practice)*, Oliveros goes on to expand the concept of Deep Listening further to include Quantum Listening which she defines as "listening to more than one reality simultaneously" or "listening in as many ways as possible simultaneously – changing and being changed by the listening." This is an interesting concept to explore in terms of dream listening as one is constantly receiving both external sounds as well as the impression of the sound as it manifests in the dream. One may also drift in and out of sleep, half-waking, and simultaneously experience the sound of their environment along with their auditory dream impressions. Regarding "changing and being changed by the listening," this refers to the way one processes what they hear (Quantum Listening 1-2). When listening to sound in a dream, we are changed by the listening in

that our consciousness may shift into a state of lucidity or the dream may make such an impression that causes one to recall the sound upon waking. Our awareness in turn changes what is heard as the auditory impression is received ephemerally in the dream state or as a memory in the waking state.

So, how do we actually perceive sound in dreams? In a 2019 study based on 10 reported dreams each from 13 participants, it was gathered that the most common auditory impressions fell into three categories: (1) the dreamer herself speaking, (2) speaking by other people, and (3) other types of auditory impressions (e.g. music). The quality of these impressions was reported to either have been “clearly heard” or “thought-like,” or sensing that a sound occurred without actually hearing it (Fosse). Regarding musical impressions, much has been philosophized on the meaning of music in dreams as well its relation to the psyche, the unconscious mind, and the origin of the Self. Hildemaire Streich points out that music often appears in dreams as a therapeutic agent of the psyche, drawing correlations between experiencing certain musical events in dreams and the initiation of new phases of inner development (Streich). Stefano Carta goes on to expand by exploring the possible meaning of music as the most fundamental human symbolic experience. The author interprets the role of music in dreams to be representational of the true Self. Additionally, Carta believes that any non-auditory elements during the moment of perception of music in a dream are expressions of the sonic and consequential emotional tone of the dream (Carta). In these findings as well as Oliveros’, it becomes apparent that the act of listening, especially in dreams, transcends simply hearing as a survival and communication mechanism and enters into the realms of semiology, spirituality, questions on the origin of human nature, and new depths of acute awareness.

## **Methodology:**

To begin the compositional process for the dream soundscape, I wrote in a dream journal for about one week. I would try and remember as much as I possibly could from my dreams and write them down a few minutes after I would wake up. For me, recalling my dreams, even moments after waking is quite difficult as the memories typically fade quickly. Because of this, my journal ended up consisting of short fragments of dream memories rather than accounts of entire dreams. I based my soundscape off of these fragments, creating a sort of collage of sonic representations of these short snippets from my journal as if they were all part of a single dream that occurred during one night. It was interesting to note the different types of sound impressions I perceived in my dreams. In the Fosse study mentioned above, perceiving sounds such as music was the least prevalent auditory impression reported among the participants. However, in my dreams, music showed up very frequently, perhaps more frequently than any other sound. I speculate that perhaps as a sound artist and musician, music is more deeply embedded in my subconscious mind due to working with it daily, therefore it manifests in my dreams more frequently. Other frequent sounds I encountered were my own voice, the sounds of other people speaking, particularly voices of people I am close to, and other atonal sounds such as vehicle engines, rain, wind, cicadas, gunshots, and others. In the soundscape, I chose to try and represent some of these sounds in the way that I heard them. In some of the fragments, particularly ones in which I could only recall visual elements or “thought-like” sound impressions of the dream, I chose sounds that simply represented the scene or environment that I was in in the dream.

The audio clips that I used in the piece were sourced from the British Library of Sounds, freesound.org, and theguardian.com. I also recorded some original field recordings for the

composition using a Zoom H4N Pro portable recorder. I set the recorder on my bedside table close to the curtains and bedsheets and angled it in such a way to capture a balanced signal from both the sounds of the bed covers and the curtain being drawn. I pressed record and staged a reenactment of my nightly routine by walking in the bedroom, closing the door, pulling the curtains closed, turning out the light, getting under the covers, then slowly beginning my best attempt at snoring. I also recorded some voluntary fake snores from my wife that were used during the middle of the piece. To record the waking up sequence, I set the recorder in the same location on the bedside table. I set an alarm to go off on my phone and once it went off, pulled the covers off of me, sat up, yawned, and opened the curtains.

One of my dreams took place on a mountain in Antarctica. To convey the feeling of strong icy winds blowing I set out to the docks by the Marina Market in Cork and attached contact microphones to a metal gate. I recorded about 10 minutes of the gate, capturing the sound of the wind blowing through the metal bars. Additionally, to represent one of my dreams that took place in a cabin on a cool summer night, I used a field recording of cicadas and night ambiance that I captured last year back in Mississippi before I left for Ireland.

### **Soundscape Analysis:**

The piece begins with the staged going to sleep sequence described above (1). Once the snoring starts, it slowly fades out as reverb is gradually automated onto the track to create a sense that the first-person perspective is slipping into a dream state. The first dream scene is from a dream where I was in a large, multi-story concert hall. On one floor, the Christmas carol, “God Rest Ye Merry Gentleman (2)” (I distinctly remember it was this tune) was being played though no performers were visible and I was the only audience member in attendance. This song fades

in then out and footsteps (3) are heard as I move downstairs in the building. Wood squeaking (4) is audible as I move down the wooden steps and into another concert hall, this one filled with people chattering (5). An orchestra starts to play classical music (6). The tune is unfamiliar though I recall the mood of it to be rather melancholic (the recording is Bach, in the soundscape). A new section of the dream emerges as I am now outside a small log cabin in the forest in southern Mississippi. Thunder and rain (7) enter as well as the sound of cicadas (8). A representation of "Quantum Listening" now occurs as I can perceive the sounds of my snoring (9) simultaneously along with the dream soundscape. The dream continues and I am now climbing up an icy mountain in Antarctica. Other climbers (10) are present, scaling the slope much more quickly than I. The wind is fierce and howling (11) as other strange sounds are heard (12). In the piece, this sound (12) is a recording of seismic activity taken under the ice in Antarctica. It is meant to help evoke the intensity of the dream scene as well as represent the abstraction and obscurity of the dream state. The soundscape moves into its final fragment as I am suddenly a soldier in a warzone. Gunshots are being fired all around me (13) as a marching tune is played by the band (14). This part of the dream gets abruptly cut off as an alarm clock sounds waking me from sleep. I sit up, yawn, then open the curtains to let the sunlight in as the piece concludes (15).

### **Conclusion:**

This was a very interesting project to undertake as it exposed me to new concrete and abstract methods of listening as well as brought my awareness toward the myriad of ways that we can perceive sound. I am interested to further explore the topic of dream listening, particularly concerning how the sound manifests in memory upon waking, how the sounds can

be symbolically interpreted, and how the understanding of the nature of sound might change with these new insights.

## **Glossary of Sounds:**

- (1.) Maloney, Nicholas. "Going to Sleep.wav" Recorded 25 April 2021.
- (2.) theblockofosound235. "Carillon Bells – God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen." *Freesound*.  
Accessed April 27, 2021.  
<https://freesound.org/people/theblockofosound235/sounds/458295/>
- (3.) Mydo1. "Footsteps on Wood." *Freesound*. Accessed April 27, 2021.  
<https://freesound.org/people/Mydo1/sounds/198962/>
- (4.) tmkappelt. "Footsteps\_Squeaky\_Wood." *Freesound*. Accessed April 27, 2021.  
<https://freesound.org/people/tmkappelt/sounds/85687/>
- (5.) toonothing. "Crowd Noise." *Freesound*. Accessed April 27, 2021.  
<https://freesound.org/people/toonothing/sounds/180929/>
- (6.) Bach, Johann Sebastian. "Suites, BWV1068. Air/Bach." Performed by Le Double Quintette, Lensen, Jean (conductor) on 11 July 1911. *British Library – Sounds*. Accessed April 27, 2021. <https://sounds.bl.uk/Classical-music/Chamber-music/026M-1CS0052775XX-0100V0>
- (7.) Volans, Kevin. "Storm-Afternoon (heavy rain and loud thunder)." Part of Kevin Volans Southern African Music Collection. Recorded 2 January 1979. *British Library – Sounds*. Accessed April 27, 2021. <https://sounds.bl.uk/World-and-traditional-music/Kevin-Volans-South-Africa/025M-C0740X002X15-0100V0>
- (8.) Maloney, Nicholas. "Loud Cicadas and Rain.wav" Recorded 3 March 2020.
- (9.) Maloney, Nicholas. "Tori Snoring (Take 2).wav" Recorded 25 April 2021.

- (10.) betchkal. “Climbers Travel in a Rope Team, West Buttress Route of Mt. McKinley, Alaska.” *Freesound*. Accessed April 27, 2021.  
<https://freesound.org/people/betchkal/sounds/149021/>
- (11.) Maloney, Nicholas. “Large Metal Gate (Contact Mics).wav” Recorded 23 April 2021.
- (12.) American Geophysical Union. “Researchers capture audio of Antarctic ice ‘singing.’” 18 October 2018. *The Guardian*. Accessed April 27, 2021.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/global/video/2018/oct/18/researchers-capture-audio-of-antarctic-ice-singing-video>
- (13.) Lubini. “End of WWII on Elba - Soviets Celebrating.” *Freesound*. Accessed April 27, 2021. <https://freesound.org/people/Lubini/sounds/338321/>
- (14.) adeluc4. “Civil War Music.” *Freesound*. Accessed April 27, 2021.  
<https://freesound.org/people/adeluc4/sounds/125347/>
- (15.) Maloney, Nicholas. “Waking Up.wav” Recorded 25 April 2021.

### **Text References:**

Carta, Stefano. "Music in Dreams and the Emergence of the Self." *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 54, no. 1 (2009): 85–102. <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ucc.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1111/j.1468-5922.2008.01759.x>

Fosse, Roar, and Frank Larøi. "Quantifying Auditory Impressions in Dreams in Order to Assess the Relevance of Dreaming as a Model for Psychosis." *PLOS ONE* 15, no. 3 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0230212>.

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Oliveros, Pauline. "Quantum Listening: From Practice to Theory (To Practice Practice)." *MusicWorks* #75. 9 December 1999.

Streich, Hildemarie. "Music in Dreams." *Jung Journal* 3, no. 2 (2009): 63–73. [https://www-jstor-org.ucc.idm.oclc.org/stable/10.1525/jung.2009.3.2.63?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www-jstor-org.ucc.idm.oclc.org/stable/10.1525/jung.2009.3.2.63?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)